



Congressman Boucher, Second Harvest Food Bank Director Pamela Irvine, Travis Jackson from the USDA and Second Harvest Food Bank staff members cut the ribbon for the federally funded Abingdon Distribution Center.

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Grand Opening of the Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank Abingdon Distribution Center

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April 1, 2010

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Abingdon, Virginia

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I am pleased to join you this morning for the grand opening of Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank's federally funded Abingdon Distribution Center. The Food Bank serves a critical need for many families in this region. The Abingdon Distribution Center provides nearly 6 million pounds of food annually to families in 11 counties. In addition to providing food directly to families, the Abingdon Distribution Center of the Food Bank ships more than 13 million pounds of food each year to 340 partner agencies in 26 counties.

I have been working with officials from Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank on their need for a facility large enough to meet this demand for several years. The Appalachian Branch of Southwest Virginia Second Harvest began in a small corner room on the corner of Russell and Valley streets in 1989. The distribution center quickly grew to encompass the entire lower level of that building, including a soup kitchen which served more than 500 lunches each week. That facility served the agency for two decades; however, the space, which was 9,000 square feet in size, became inadequate for the Food Bank to meet its growing role as a distribution center for food banks and other partners throughout the region. The ceilings were low, making it impossible to create efficient stacks of product which in turn limits the floor space available for refrigeration units. The single loading dock had to be accessed at an angle which made loading and unloading challenging and dangerous. Additionally, parking was limited, and the national affiliate for the Food Bank, Feeding America, advised that the building was not in compliance with its safety standards. Unfortunately, there was no room for expansion and improvement at that location.

My office worked with the staff of Southwest Virginia Second Harvest as it searched for a new home in Washington County. When this facility was selected for its high ceilings and plentiful floor space, I secured federal funding to assist with the purchase and renovation of the building. In 2008, I announced that at my urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Development Agency was providing two low-interest federal loans totaling nearly \$2 million to purchase the building and the necessary distribution equipment to meet the Food Bank's needs.

With the benefit of the federal funds, the facility where we gather today has been purchased and renovated as a modern food distribution center. The space includes warehouse storage space 10,000 square feet in size. In addition, the new facility contains office space 2,000 square feet in size, floor space 1,000 square feet in size, one covered loading dock, two self-leveling bumper pad docks, three large shipping doors one of which is operated by electric motor, a freezer 1,500 square feet in size, a cooler 1,250 square feet in size, a salvage sorting room and an outfitted kitchen. Additionally, Southwest Virginia Second Harvest has purchased two lift trucks, storage racking, electric pallet jacks, a reach truck, office and kitchen equipment.

Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank began moving into the Abingdon Distribution Center in December, and I am pleased to note that the new facility is providing more efficient and safe food distribution to families across the region.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize Pamela Irvine, President and CEO of the Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank and her staff here at the Abingdon Distribution Center for their dedication to serving the nutrition needs of families in our region.

I also want to thank Travis Jackson with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency, who assisted the Food Bank with its application for federal funds and guided the application through the USDA approval process.

A number of other donors have contributed to the Food Bank to enable the opening of this new facility. The Food Bank is still seeking support from individuals willing to contribute to help with the ongoing costs associated with moving into the new facility.

Alpha Natural Resources has been a major contributor to the new facility, and I would like to thank Ted Pile who is with us this morning with Alpha for the company's support of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my Deputy Chief of Staff Laura Lee for her persistent and persuasive efforts in urging that federal funding be provided for this worthwhile project.

The grand opening of the new Abingdon Distribution Center will aid countless families across our region. The success we mark today is an example of what can be achieved when citizens and government work together in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work, I want to congratulate all here on this achievement and offer special congratulations to the Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank staff on the opening of its new facility.